

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND
WILDLIFE
IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 62
“An Act To Remove the Prohibition on Baiting Deer”**

Presented by: Representative LYFORD of Eddington

Cosponsored by: Representative BLACK of Wilton, CAMPBELL of Orrington,
HILLIARD of Belgrade, REED of Carmel, STEARNS of Guilford, WOOD of Greene.

DATE OF HEARING: March 2, 2017

Good afternoon Senator Cyrway, Representative Duchesne and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Jim Connolly, Resource Management Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department in opposition to **L.D. 62**.

This bill repeals the prohibition on baiting deer for hunting purposes.

There are many reasons that this bill poses issues for deer and hunters.

Concentrating deer at greater than natural densities exposes them to disease through saliva and fecal matter. In 2015 and 2016 the State of Pennsylvania documented Chronic Wasting Disease in their white-tail deer herd. This is a highly communicable disease, and as our deer biologist Kyle pointed out in his report to you, CWD is 100% fatal for deer. As an agency we have been working very hard to prevent the spread of CWD. Allowing the use of bait will exacerbate the transmission of CWD if it migrates to Maine.

This bill has potential to increase the likelihood that people will move from a “baiting season” to a winter feeding program. As you all know, the Department actively discourages feeding of deer in the winter months due to problems such as increased car-deer collisions and increased spread of disease. Deer are often not capable of digesting the types of grains or other foods often provided in the winter, which can actually be fatal to the deer. The spread of disease is particularly problematic for a species like deer, where winter feeding stations (or bait stations) can attract dozens of animals, if not hundreds into a small area.

Baiting of deer will likely increase the success rate of hunters, and as a result the Department may need to shorten hunting seasons or reduce the number of antlerless deer permits afforded to hunters in order to keep harvests at sustainable levels. It is very important to note that in most of the state (Northern, Eastern, and Western Maine) we are trying to grow the deer population and we are currently meeting our harvest objectives and do not need to increase success rates.

Lastly, as you all know, Maine does allow the use of bait for black bear (as well as furbearers). So, why would we allow it for bear but not deer? As wildlife managers, it is our responsibility to manage wildlife using the tools that are most appropriate for that species. We do not manage all species the same and we would be irresponsible if we did. For example, we allow people to use decoys for ducks, and dogs for ruffed grouse and many other species. We do not manage non-game species such as bald eagles and piping plovers the same way, even though they are both rare birds. We do not manage deer the same way we manage bears because they are very different animals. The habitats wildlife occur in, their biology and habits are very different. Black bears occur in dense wooded areas and are highly adept at avoiding hunters, so we need the use of bait to help us manage the bear population. It is important to note that while Maine allows the baiting of bear, there are approximately 10,000 licensed bear hunters vs. 220,000 licensed deer hunters. Without the use of bait, we would not reach our harvest goals for bear. Deer occur in a wide variety of habitat and will more commonly frequent open spaces that allow for an effective shot to be taken by hunters without the use of bait.

We do not believe there is any reason to eliminate the ban on baiting deer at this time.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.